

# OKLAHOMA STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**DATE:** May 8, 2001

**TIME:** 9:30 a.m.

**PLACE:** Metro Tech Conference Center  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

**PRESENT:** Darrel Dominick, Chairman, NRCS  
Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency  
Jim Stiegler, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Shawn Lepard, Pro Ag  
D. Chongo Mundende, Langston University  
Mike Houts, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality  
Ken Williams, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
John Hendrix, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation  
Mason Mungle, Oklahoma Farmers Union  
Jack Eckroat, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Ginger Lyde, Farm Service Agency  
Milton Sovo, Caddo Tribe  
Kenneth Battles, Choctaw Nation  
Paul Knight, Bureau of Indian Affairs  
LaDonna McCowan, Landowners & Tenants Association  
Chris Hise, The Nature Conservancy  
Mike Sams, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation  
Kurt Atkinson, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Forestry Services  
Jerry Brabander, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Ben Pollard, Oklahoma Conservation Commission  
Brenton Johnson, Bureau of Reclamation  
Jim Hall, AARP  
Brad Lamb, Environmental Protection Agency  
J.D. Strong, Office of Secretary for Environment  
Marla Peek, Oklahoma Farm Bureau  
Nathan Notah, Intertribal Ag Council  
Fred Wyatt, Farm Service Agency State Committee Member  
Terry Wyatt, Oklahoma Conservation Commission  
Charles Freeman, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture  
Ted Kuntz, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Dwight Guy, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Kevin Norton, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Chris Stoner, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Suzanne Collier, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Keith Vaughan, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Joni Hays, Natural Resources Conservation Service

### **1. Meeting Called to Order – Darrel Dominick, Chairman**

Darrel Dominick, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. All present made introductions by stating their name and agency, organization, or group affiliation. This meeting was held in compliance with the Oklahoma Open Meeting Laws.

### **2. Nutrient Management – Keith Vaughan, Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Keith Vaughan presented information regarding the Nutrient Management Standard. There is new policy on this and a need to look at surface waters being affected by phosphorus. Different studies across the country are looking at excess applications of phosphorus and the effects on water quality. All NRCS employees who review and approve nutrient management plans will now be certified. Certification will involve completing a nutrient management training course and achieving a score of 70% or better on a test upon completion of the course. The State Conservationist will conduct random audits each year to ensure NRCS employees are maintaining their certification. Keith also provided tables outlining the Non-Nutrient Limited Watersheds and the Nutrient Limited Watersheds. He also described the Severe Rating – No Application, and Waste Application Rates of full rate, half rate, and a split application. Keith provided a handout outlining the Nutrient Management Standard.

### **3. Overview of EQIP Activity - Kevin Norton, NRCS**

Kevin provided a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the EQIP program from 1997 to 2001. Copies of the PowerPoint presentation for this item and item 4 were provided to the participants. EQIP originated with the 1996 Farm Bill, and today we have 3,063 contracts with \$15.5 million obligated involving 827,775 acres. The cancellation rate is at 7.2%; most of the cancellations are 1997 contracts (approximately 100 of 222). For 2001 there were 30 priority areas with a \$3.5 million allocation. There were four statewide priority resource concerns in 2001: Soil Resources, Water Resources, Grazing Lands (Eastern redcedar), and Fish and Wildlife (Lesser Prairie Chicken). A supplemental allocation of \$450,000 for Oklahoma was provided in the Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill and is being utilized to initiate work with community-based organizations and on tribally owned lands. Any monies not used in this outreach effort will go to statewide concerns for funding additional contracts.

### **4. State Technical Committee Funding Decisions for FY2002 EQIP - Kevin Norton, NRCS**

- **Recommendation for distribution of funds to Priority Areas and Statewide Resource Concerns**

Kevin then discussed the role of the State Technical Committee and the three decisions to be made by the Committee: (1) determine distribution of funds between priority areas and statewide priority concerns; (2) recommend priority area proposals and statewide priority concerns to the national office for consideration; and (3) recommend approved priority areas and funding levels.

Kevin stated that there has always been an 80%/20% split in the distribution of funds between priority areas and statewide concerns. Educational assistance has been at 3% of the financial assistance funding level in previous years; it has been determined nationally that the allocation cannot exceed 2% of the financial assistance allocation.

***Mason Mungle made a motion to have a 70%/30% distribution of funds between priority areas/statewide concerns. Marla Peek seconded the motion.***

Several comments were made regarding this issue: there is a need to look at the priority areas that will be rolled over and the new ones that will be funded before a decision is made as to what the split will be; the objective of EQIP is to increase the amount of funds going to priority areas and move away from statewide concerns; there are still those needs in the state whether in a priority area or not to protect their resources – need to address a broader area and move the percentage up to assist producers where the local people have not put forth the effort to develop a priority area; questioned whether there are great results seen in priority areas that were first funded- is there a great improvement in wildlife numbers, etc.; some counties have 10-40 people participating with \$40,000 - \$50,000 going to one producer – does not help some of our smaller producers; there is a \$50,000 contract maximum compared to \$3,500/year in the previous program and we are meeting the needs of producers in priority areas and have done very positive things; this is only the 4<sup>th</sup> year in the program with 1/3 of practices implemented; this program was written to go in a very different direction to put funds where there is a legitimate need; when looking at the number of acres treated feel we are getting good results for the money provided.

***A vote was taken on the motion to change the distribution to 70%/30%.***

***Vote: The motion failed.***

J.D. Strong suggested the Committee review the priority areas and vote again.

Fred Wyatt suggested that the Committee take a tour to see results in the priority areas, and Kevin stated that we will see what can be done to host some tours.

Darrel Dominick commented that 70% of land is privately held, 95% in Oklahoma, and we are very lucky to have the cost-share that is available. He feels the Committee needs to speak to others; tours can be held, but thinks it will take bigger investments to see the results we want.

Kevin commented that we are buying conservation with every EQIP dollar at the local level to meet local people's needs.

***Mason Mungle made a motion to change the distribution to 75%/25%. Marla Peek seconded the motion.***

Brad Lamb stated that if we increase the amount of funding to statewide concerns, how do we ever find results. There is room for improvement on determining results, but it is a slow process. He feels we will divert away from looking at results if we go to statewide concerns.

Marla Peek asked if this is the last year EQIP is authorized, and Kevin Norton commented that EQIP would run its course on 12/31/02.

Marla Peek stated that she views EQIP as an agricultural program; there are other programs for water quality, endangered species, and wildlife. She feels like this program needs to be spread around more.

Chongo Mundende commented he feels we are putting the cart before the horse; people have worked very hard to develop priority areas and we need to go through the process to see what we have. If any funds are left over, they can go to non-priority areas. He thinks only larger farmers will benefit from the non-priority areas.

Rod Wanger stated that non-priority areas do matter and have conservation problems, which may prevent larger conservation problems. He feels we need to look at what priority areas will be funded first before we decide what distribution of funds to make. He wishes we had both the ACP and EQIP programs available.

Terry Wyatt commented that producers see all of the money going to a few people. She feels if we divide the money out into a larger area with more producers, we might see more money coming to us.

Mason Mungle withdrew his motion, and Marla Peek who had seconded it agreed to the withdrawal.

***Fred Wyatt made a motion to accept funding of Educational Assistance at the 2% level. Marla Peek seconded the motion.***

***Vote: The motion passed.***

Kevin Norton discussed the priority area funding request process, and stated that the Technical Review Group met to rank and review proposals March 6-9, 2001. There are 12 proposals that have requested to continue their 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year priority area to 2002, 6 proposals that have requested to continue their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year priority area to 2002, and 13 new priority area proposals. This totals 31 priority areas with \$4.3 million requested.

Fred Wyatt asked what % of work has been implemented in the funded priority areas. Salt Fork and Wewoka Creek are both asking for their 5<sup>th</sup> year of funding. Salt Fork has 32.2% implemented; Wewoka Creek has over 40% implementation. The statewide average is 34%. Salt Fork receives \$200 - \$300,000/year in funding; the last of 1998 approvals are getting things done and work is scattered all over the priority area.

Kevin Norton discussed options for approval and allocation for priority areas, and asked if the Committee wants to continue the policy of carrying over all priority areas for up to three years non-competitively.

Rod Wanger commented on the Cimarron Ogallala Priority Area and wanted an analysis of whether we can accomplish anything there. Kevin Norton replied that two contracts were terminated in this area for financial reasons; these were water conservation contracts. Chris Stoner stated that the reason these two people dropped out was because of high energy costs, but Chris feels there is a definite potential to help the overall situation there as well as very good educational assistance being provided. Of the 10 contracts there, none are implemented and all are caught in the downturn of the economy. This is the 2nd year of this priority area.

Fred Wyatt stated that it might be better to concentrate resources on the existing priority areas instead of implementing new ones.

John Hendrix commented that even if the EQIP program ends, whatever monies are obligated in a contract remain with it. Kevin Norton stated that this is correct and is something to think about it, but we have been operating under the assumption that EQIP will continue.

- **Recommendation for Third and Fourth Year Priority Areas**

The next issue brought before the Committee was Third and Fourth Year Priority Areas. Kevin stated that the committee could disapprove all proposals, approve and forward all proposals for an additional year of funding, or pick and choose which ones should be continued.

***Fred Wyatt made a motion to continue all of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year priority area proposals. Jim Stiegler seconded the motion.***

***Vote: The motion passed.***

- **Recommendation for New Priority Area Proposals**

The Review Team evaluated 13 new priority area proposals and completed a technical and overall evaluation ranking. The technical review ranked the following 6 new proposals at the top and recommended them for funding: Nobletown, East Deep Fork, Milo, Okfuskee Southeast, Caney Valley, and Logan County —T16N, R1E.

Brad Lamb commented that East Deep Fork listed surface water quality as a concern as well as West Osage Water Quality. He stated that East Deep Fork is a PL-566 structure and there is confusion with the definition of water quality and actually solving it and not just water quantity. Kevin Norton stated that East Deep Fork is a water quality issue, water quality in structures, not flood prevention. Mason Mungle agreed that upstream flood control is a water quality issue and nutrient and sediment retention cannot be discounted as a water quality issue. Brad Lamb said there is no justification in solving the water quality issue and a need to look at it over the next year. Kevin Norton commented that EQIP does not exist merely to solve water quality issues. He stated that the West Osage Water Quality proposal came together really fast and at the last minute. The review team did not feel that the local connection was there. Suzanne Collier stated that West Osage appears to be an excellent candidate for a priority area, but there is not enough research put into it from the local workgroup.

The new priority area proposals were also reviewed by the technical review group as to invasive species proposals, and recommended funding Roger Mills Scotch Thistle Control - noxious weed control; Southwest Beckham – mesquite control; and Nowata County Sericea Lespedeza – Sericea Lespedeza control. It was questioned whether there is a wide-scale aerial application on mesquite, and the answer was yes. Jim Stiegler commented that it really should be management for mesquite and Sericea Lespedeza, not control. John Hendrix asked if the % of cover is looked at to determine if there is a problem, and Kevin Norton stated that there are threshold levels to determine needs for pest management.

***Fred Wyatt made a motion to accept the top 6 proposals and the Roger Mills Scotch Thistle Control. Mason Mungle seconded the motion.***

Kevin Norton commented that we need to show the national office that we need more money in funding requests in order to have a chance to increase our allocation.

Suzanne Collier stated that concerns have been expressed that priority areas are not getting the funds needed to solve the resource problems and get the work accomplished. The Committee might consider funding fewer priority areas and get more accomplished in existing areas.

***Fred Wyatt amended his motion to fully fund Roger Mills Scotch Thistle Control and open the other 6 proposals at a reduced initial startup level. Jim Stiegler seconded the motion.***

Kevin Norton stated that we can go with a sliding scale, but if we do not fund some of the new priority area proposals, some people will be upset as a lot of work has gone into these.

Brad Lamb commented that Roger Mills Scotch Thistle Control involves 4700 acres, but asked how many contracts that would involve? Kevin referred to the proposal for the expected number of participants.

Chongo Mundende asked if the Committee is obligated to fund at the amount requested, and Kevin Norton answered that they are not.

J.D. Strong asked if areas were funded at a reduced rate in the past, is that the reason we are not seeing much success. Kevin Norton responded that this is not a big issue in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of funding, but is an issue with those requesting large amounts of money. In priority areas, 70% of applications were funded last year, and those left unfunded are typically those not meeting the intent of the priority area.

Brad Lamb commented that it would benefit the Committee to be able to go back and evaluate what environmental benefits were actually accomplished. Brad believes we should revisit the objectives of this program and what has been accomplished.

Kevin Norton stated that we are still working on this and are putting together success stories from an environmental standpoint.

Suzanne Collier commented that the concern of the technical review group is that we are not capturing the monitoring that is needed for this program.

Another comment was made that air quality needs to be looked at also, and maybe educational assistance needs to be provided to let the producer know what the environmental issues are.

***Vote on Amendment: The amendment to the motion passed.***

- **Recommendation for Approval of Sliding Scale for Funding Priority Areas**

The following sliding scale is now being used to fund priority areas:

<b>Financial Assistance Request</b>	<b>% Funded</b>
< \$75,000	100
\$75,000 - \$200,000	70
\$200,000 - \$500,000	65
>\$500,000	50

The Committee was asked if this scale should remain in place for FY 2002 priority areas.

Fred Wyatt stated he feels the Committee should stay with the same funding level as in the past.

- **Recommendation for Amount of Money to be Allocated to New Priority Areas**

***Fred Wyatt made a motion to set aside \$300,000.00 for the new proposals and use the sliding scale on the rest as in the past. Marla Peek seconded the motion.***

***Vote: The motion passed.***

- **Recommendation for Statewide Priority Resource Concerns**

- **Statewide Priority Resource Concern for Soils**

The Committee was asked whether soils should be continued as a statewide concern.

***Mike Houts made a motion to continue with the Soil Resources Concern. Jim Stiegler seconded the motion.***

***Vote: The motion passed.***

- **Statewide Priority Resource Concern for Water**

***Mike Houts made a motion to continue with the Water Resources Concern. J.D. Strong seconded the motion.***

***Vote: The motion passed.***

- **Statewide Priority Resource Concern for Grazing Lands**

***Fred Wyatt made a motion to continue with the Grazing Lands Concern. Mason Mungle seconded the motion.***

***Vote: The motion passed.***

- **Statewide Priority Resource Concern for Fish & Wildlife**

Terry Wyatt asked if money could be spent in another way for more benefit. Kevin Norton stated that if money is not spent here, it is put in one of the other concerns with FSA State Committee concurrence.

John Hendrix commented that there could be a high plains initiative looking at quail; they could look at different ranking aspects targeted differently.

***John Hendrix made a motion to look at the high plains region of Oklahoma with upland species. Ken Williams seconded the motion.***

***Vote: The motion passed.***

- **Recommended Allocations to Priority Resource Concerns**

The Committee was asked to recommend allocations to priority resource concerns. The allocations in place at present are:

40% - Soil Resources  
10% - Water Resources  
40% - Grazing Lands  
10% - Fish & Wildlife

***Mason Mungle made a motion to accept the allocations as currently distributed. Ken Williams seconded the motion.***

***Vote: The motion passed.***

## **5. Other Comments – Kevin Norton, NRCS**

Kevin commented that there have been no concerns regarding the conservation practices list, so it will continue as is.

## **6. Report on EQIP Educational Activities – Jack Eckroat, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service**

Jack Eckroat spoke to the group regarding EQIP educational assistance and materials available. There is a web site available, which provides a list of seminars and provides information on how to apply for educational assistance funds. The EQIP website is: <http://plantsoil.okstate.edu/EQIP>.

#### **7. Continuous CRP Signup – Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency**

Rod Wanger presented an overview of the Continuous CRP Signup. Additional incentive payments are provided to landowners to encourage their enrollment into this program, and Rod asked for the Committee's assistance in promoting this program.

Rod also discussed other conservation efforts going on such as the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP). This program involved a pond cleanout program and because of the drought, 2,458 contracts were initiated in 1998, 2,132 in 1999, and 2,373 in 2000.

#### **8. Adjournment – Darrel Dominick**

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.